

Delaware Bird Records Committee Annual Report for 2021

Frank Rohrbacher
on behalf of the Delaware Bird Records Committee

This is the 25th report of the Delaware Bird Records Committee. The 2021 committee members were Jim White, president; Frank Rohrbacher, secretary and review members Anthony Gonzon, Frank Rohrbacher, John Janowski, Jim White and Jean Woods. At the 10 August 2021 annual meeting, Chris Bennett replaced Jean Woods as review member, Anthony Gonzon was elected secretary and Jim White continued as president. The Committee decided that the records being submitted should be improved with better written reports to supplement photographs. The Committee will encourage this by reaching out to reporters. New DBRC Bylaws were adopted. Significant changes have been made in the Delaware State Bird and Review Species Lists because of the major changes that have occurred in the AOS taxonomy. The Committee updated the Delaware State List of Bird Species, the Delaware Review List, and the index of all records adjudicated as of 1 September. These documents are available to the birding community via the DOS website.

This year's summary contains 19 records involving 18 species, including the first state records for Black-chinned Hummingbird, Ancient Murrelet and Bell's Vireo. With these additions the Official Delaware Bird State List now consists of 427 species. A "Western Flycatcher" was approved even though it is was no longer considered a species when it came up for review, having been split into Pacific-slope Flycatcher and Cordilleran Flycatcher. Because they are not separable in the field without voice or measurements in hand, the observation could not be assigned to either species. Name changes of note: Mew Gull is split becoming Short-billed Gull (American) and Common Gull (Eurasian). Therefore DBRC adjudicated records will be reviewed in the next year to establish which of the two species they represent. Finally, we all mourn the loss of the Eurasian Collared-Dove as the colony in Selbyville has disappeared. It started in 1997 with 2 birds, grew to 19 birds by 2004, declined to 1 in 2020 before disappearing in 2021. It appears that the hopeful signs of sightings along Jonny Cake Landing Road, Frederica, over the last three years did not pan out.

For the summary below, date, location, DBRC reference number, and documentation received are listed for all records; photographers and reporters are credited only for accepted records. Accepted records use the standard taxonomic order as of 1 July 2021 of the AOS. The DBRC

emphasizes that a report deemed "not accepted" does not necessarily mean that the Committee believed the species was misidentified, but rather that the documentation submitted was insufficient to establish the claimed identity.

Accepted Records

Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna autumnalis*

4 June 2020 Bombay Hook NWR
DBRC 20/19 Photographs (KF, WC)

Now that we know that this species is a confirmed breeding resident, it can be removed from the Review List. However, the DBRC members will miss these great photographs of a beautiful bird like those in this record.

Black-chinned Hummingbird, *Archilochus alexandri*

25 October–9 November 2020 Doddtown Road near Harbeson

DBRC 20/26 Banding Data, Notes, Photographs (BE, BP)

This bird was a spectacular find and stayed a long time, but COVID-19 shut down the crowds. The documentation was outstanding. Bruce Peterjohn captured, took measurements and banded this bird with the resident photographing the entire process. His analyses of the data established beyond any doubt that it was a hatch year female Black-chinned Hummingbird for a first Delaware Record.

Calliope Hummingbird, *Selasphorus calliope*

19–20 November 2020 Bear
DBRC 20/27 Notes, Photographs (MM, MMA)

Again, a very rare bird was seen by few because of the pandemic. Michael Moore was asked by the resident to identify it. Moore did so with great photographs and a well written description. The bird was a hatch year male. It is the second accepted record for this species.

Wilson's Plover, *Charadrius wilsonia*

26 July 2020 Cape Henlopen Point
DBRC 20/17 Notes (BP)

This species was on the wish list of every birder in Delaware ever since one was found at Bowers Beach, 24 May 2019. Now, we have a second accepted bird at Cape Henlopen Point, just over 14 months later. The documentation was first rate.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*

7–15 November 2020 Bombay Hook NWR
 DBRC 20/38 Notes, Photographs (LK, CB)

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper is rare bird in the entire ABA area. We are pleased that this is the third state record. Previous records are in August 1993 and in August 2002. This bird was a great find at Bombay Hook NWR (although the November date seems fairly late). Great photographs and a write up made this an easy vote.

Long-tailed Jaeger, *Stercorarius longicaudus*

20 May 2020 Cape Henlopen SP, Herring Point
 DBRC 20/21 Photographs (LB)

Standing at Herring Point for five hours in a very strong ENE winds does have its reward, for example: you could see and photograph an adult Long-tailed Jaeger in breeding plumage. With no birding pelagic trips last spring, Lucas Bobay must have been the only Delawarean with this bird on his list.

Ancient Murrelet, *Synthliboramphus antiquus*

24 June 2021 North end of Slaughter Beach
 DBRC 21/07 Notes, Photographs (MB)

This record is so insane that it had to be true. Looking at the excellent write up and mind-blowing photographs was a real treat for the Committee. The first question was how did this short-winged flying football get all the way to Delaware? The answer was easy: it flew here! Sibley (2000) shows a range map that suggests that, when some of the birds return to northern California, Oregon and Washington from nesting in Alaska, a few dozen have turned due east. Many have been seen in the Rocky Mountains, a few in the Great Plains and another cluster around the Great Lakes. Finally, two have made it to salt water on the East Coast: one in Massachusetts and now one in Delaware. The only other report close to the Atlantic Ocean was recorded on Lake Ortolan, Redding, PA in 1991. The second question is will this bird ever get home? The answer is – probably not. Again, who knows—if it takes the North West Passage, maybe and if it continues eastward, it is unlikely.

Sabine's Gull, *Xema sabini*

12 October 2020 Cape Henlopen Point
 DBRC 20/40 Notes (BP)

As the rain ended from a nor'easter that had 25-35 mph sustained winds, the Laughing Gulls started to form a flock for roosting in the in calmer waters near shore west of the point. After 150–200+ Laughing Gulls had arrived, a single immature Sabine's Gull arrived and settled in to roost. This is the fifth Delaware record, following four reported hunkering down during nor'easters, (three at Cape Henlopen Point and one at Slaughter

Beach).

Wood Stork, *Mycteria americana*

18 July 2019 Prime Hook NWR
 DBRC 20/14 Notes (BP)

This is only the fifth record this species but if the trend of other southern waders summering here continues, Delaware is going to look a lot like Florida. The first record was a leg with a band on it that was traced back to a Wood Stork, 11 January 1973. This was a well-documented report.

Magnificent Frigatebird, *Fregata magnificens*

7 November 2020 Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch
 DBRC 20/42 Notes, Photographs (JO)

Even though Lesser Frigatebird and Great Frigatebird have each had only one or two reported sightings in the continental United States, one must eliminate these species to assure that it is not one of those species. This means one must sex and age every frigatebird to prove it's a Magnificent Frigatebird. In this instance, the photograph showed an adult male Magnificent Frigatebird clearly and without doubt.

Northern Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis*

5 January 2020 Joy Run C&D Canal SWA
 DBRC 20/03 Notes (JJ, JSk)

Northern Goshawk was returned to the Delaware Review Species List a couple of years ago because of the precipitous drop in the numbers of this species flying through Delaware. In the past three years, only two have been reported. One was adjudicated last year and this record was accepted this year. The documentation was great and increases our waiting for a bird that had been rare until six years ago.

Ash-throated Flycatcher, *Myiarchus cinerascens*

20 November 2020 Augustine WA, Ashton Tract
 DBRC 20/25 Photographs (AE)

The photographs are very good, taken by a birder/photographer who also found the "Western Flycatcher" at the same time. This sighting brought birders from across Delaware to the Ashton Tract.

"Western Flycatcher", Pacific-slope/Cordilleran Flycatcher, *Empidonax difficilis/occidentalis*

20 November 2020, 9 December 2020 Augustine WA, Ashton Tract
 DBRC 20/24 Notes, Photographs (RC, AE)

This bird was beautifully photographed by both reporters at the Ashton Tract. The assumption was made that, even though seen twenty days apart, that it was the same bird. Furthermore, both reporters are outstanding birders and listened intently for any vocalization, but

both reported that the bird did not make a “peep”. That means it was not able to be identified to the specific species, which is always tough on the reviewers. It appears that many birds are just deemed “Western Flycatcher” because of the birds are hard to find and, once found, are not very vocal. Sibley (2000) shows the range maps for both species. The Cordilleran Flycatcher nests in the Rocky Mountains, from the southern border of Montana into Mexico and migrate directly south through Mexico. It shows little inclination to wander and has no sightings east of the Mississippi River. The Pacific-slope Flycatcher, on the other hand, nests along the Pacific Ocean from the Yukon in Canada to Mexico. The eastern coastal states have no reports of this species except in small sliver of land on the Atlantic Coast from lower New York to lower Virginia. The heart of this range is Cape May. How they get there or where they go is a mystery. So, it appears that it is most likely a Pacific-slope Flycatcher.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, *Tyrannus forficatus*

3 Jun 2020 Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch
DBRC 20/13 Notes (BP)

This bird was seen from the Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch as it flew across the vegetation below, where it stopped briefly on a shrub and was seen well. As this bird is fairly distinctive and not likely to be confused with other species, it is good to have documentation that truly describes the bird in great detail.

Bell’s Vireo, *Vireo bellii*

5 October 2020 East Lake Drive, Rehoboth Beach
DBRC 2030 Photograph (PC)

This record consists of a single photograph but it is sufficient to add Bell’s Vireo to the Delaware Bird List. The photograph shows a yellow bird with a white chin, pale short thick bill, a gray head and cheeks. The back is gray with a tinge of yellow and the tail is gray with a touch of brown. The wings are gray, with white tipped greater coverts that produce a pronounced white wing-bar; the median coverts had less white on the tips, producing a muted wing-bar. The head is gray, with white lores; the white eye-ring is split with a thin eye-line. The legs are blue. This is a bright Eastern Bell’s Vireo. There are two other subspecies, one in Arizona and one in California, but both are very drab.

Black-throated Gray Warbler, *Setophaga nigrescens*

11 September 2020 Cape Henlopen SP, Gordons
Pond boardwalk
DBRC 20/23 Photograph (DD)

A perfect photograph established that this bird was a Black-throated Gray Warbler and a third Delaware record. Unfortunately, it could not be located again.

22 September 2020 Cape Henlopen SP, Nature Center
DBRC 20/28 Notes, Photographs (AK, BP)

This bird, like the previous warbler, was present only a few hours, but its location allowed many birders to see it. This is the fourth Delaware record and the all of them were seen in Cape Henlopen SP.

Painted Bunting, *Passerine ciris*

29 May 2020 Cape Henlopen Hawk Watch
DBRC 20/15 Notes (BP)

A well written report of a first year male. As many are aware, Painted Buntings are no longer on the Review List but this report came in just before the end date.

Records Not Accepted

Trumpeter Swan, *Cygnus buccinator*

10 November 2020 Bombay Hook NWR
DBRC 20/36

The photographs of this swan are highly suggestive of a Trumpeter Swan but the Committee felt that they needed more data to make a call.

Reporters

Chris Bennett, Lucas Bobay, Marc Butt, Peggy Clapp, Ryan Crane, William Culp, Deborah Dohne, Bob Edelen, Andy Ednie, John Janowski, Kevin Fox, Alissa Kegelman, Jennifer Ottinger, Lynn Kohler, Mariano Mazal (MMA), Michael Moore, Jen Ottinger, Bruce Peterjohn, John Skibicki

Literature Cited

Sibley, D.A. 2000. The Sibley Guide to Birds. National Audubon Society, Alfred A Knopf, New York.